DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 164 527 SP 013 704

AUTHOR Broudy, H. S.
TITLE Predicaments, Problems. Puzzles, and Paradoxes in Educational Research.
PUB DATE Dec 78
NOTE 19p.; Paper prepared for the National Council on Educational Research (San Diego, California, December 15-16, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Philosophy; *Educational Research; Educational Theories; *Historical Reviews; *Research Needs; *School Role; *Social Sciences; *Teacher Role

ABSTRACT

Educational research is designed to deal with problems. Some problems in American education cannot be understood outside their historical-philosophical contexts. This paper presents arguments concerning the limitations of standard empirical research in the field of education. This is accomplished by following developments in the culture that have rendered the "in loco parentis," "in loco communitatis," and "in loco humanitatis" roles of public schools anachronistic. Suggestions for education research as a result of these developments are offered. (JMF)

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* PREDICAMENTS, PROBLEMS, PUZZLES, AND PARADOXES IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

H. S. Broudy

University of Illinois

Urbana

*Edited by author on December 21, 1978

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PREDICAMENTS, PROBLEMS, PUZZLES, AND PARADOXES IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

H. S. Broudy
University of Illinois
Urbana

Prologue

The topic assigned to me was the "History and Philosophy of Education," and my first impulse was to do a paper on the history of the history of education and the history of the philosophy of education. The constraints of time and competence led me to think that the Council might make more direct connection with the topic, through some examples of problems in American schooling that cannot be understood outside of or can be understood better in their historical-philosophical contexts.

The paper takes the form of (1) an argument concerning the limitations of standard empirical research in the field of education (2) developments in the culture that have rendered three roles of the public school anachronistic, and (3) some suggestions for education research as a result of these developments.

Because of the time constraints references are omitted, but the readers can be assured that there are relevant literatures on virtually all of the topics discussed.

A prominent Congressman friendly to education a few years ago asked a group of educators, including members of the research establishment, why problems in education could not be solved with the same effectiveness that problems of farmers were solved by colleges of agriculture and their extension specialists. He noted that education had the same array of researchers, personnel trainers, and technology inventors as did colleges of agriculture. He received two kinds of answers: those that blamed practitioners for not using research results, and those that pointed out the differences between nature of research results in the two fields.

Both types of answer were in part cogent, but they raised other questions: Why, for example, would practitioners of an enterprise in perpetual trouble ignore help from any quarter? What is there about educational research that makes so much of it technically "good" yet so easily ignorable? In trying to find plausible answers to these questions, it may be helpful to note the meanings of such terms as "puzzles," "problems," "predicaments," and "paradoxes," as they are represented in educational research.

Problems, predicaments, puzzles, and paradoxes

A noted investigator in the field of cancer research recently distinguished between research that tries to solve theoretical puzzles as to causal hypotheses and research that seeks to validate by scientific procedures the efficacy of possible remedies. The puzzle solving activity is usually set off by anomalous results of well established theories, the kind that led Einstein to question the Newtonian formulations. The latter kind of research is no less scientific or theoretical, but its goal is to change a situation, relieve a predicament, solve a practical problem. The point he was making emphasized

that many practical problems can be investigated scientifically without waiting for the ultimate puzzles to be solved, albeit he was not denying that some day some great puzzle solver may hit upon a solution that will change the whole style of applied cancer research.

It might be noted that the arch puzzle people are the professional philosophers. Scientists, however ethereal and esoteric their inquiries, want to solve a puzzle. Philosophers, on the other hand, are looking for puzzles that will defy solution, but which are of such a nature that they continue to provoke attempts to solve them. The mind-body, universals-particulars, one-many are puzzles of this kind.

We do not have many scientific puzzles in education, although brain physiology and kindred biological sciences may have some that are related to teaching and learning. For example, anomalous results led Gestaltists to challenge the explanation of learning as S-R conditioning. That apparently forgotten school inputs nevertheless seem to function is a puzzle. A theory that would solve this puzzle would be of incalculable help in rationalizing general education.

Predicaments are felt incongruities, obstacles to normal practice and, as Dewey noted, we respond to them with habit, reflexes, or, if these fail, occasionally by the method of intelligence or thought. There is no lack of predicaments in education.

A problem is a predicament trussed up and made ready for application of the hypothetico-deductive method: observation, formation of tentative hypotheses drawn from known generalizations, deducing observable consequences, verifying the deductions, etc.

Do we have problems in education? Perhaps not so many as professional discourse and literature might lead us to believe. A problematic situation is one that blocks the ordinary flow of action and thought. If it yields to the hypothetico-deductive attack, we get a projected course of action, which if the hypothesis is correct, should change the situation for the better. But the hypothetico-deductive method presupposes bodies of well-established generalizations that suggest and control hypotheses. How many such generalizations are available to educational problem shapers and solvers? How many of the theories in the psychological and social sciences go beyond idiosyncratic taxonomies or hold only if a multitutde of "it all depends" are taken into consideration? Consensus does not guarantee validity, but without a good deal of guild consensus on a fairly substantial body of theory and methods of inquiry, there may not be as many problems, strictly speaking, as we say there are, loosely speaking.

I am not denying that in education analogues of empirical research as done in the sciences and in the applied fields, engineering, agriculture, medicine are possible. But the fiduciary basis for such research is weak in education and the social sciences as compared with professional fields that are grounded in the natural sciences. The persistence of a multiplicity of theories indicates that choices among them cannot as yet be made on the basis of their predictive power or their effectiveness in producing such effects as they do predict.*

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*It is noteworthy how often the term "interesting" is used to commend a finding in social science research. A finding is said to be interesting if it "explodes" a myth or counters the expectations of common sense. However, that a finding is interesting adds little to its truth value, and the conditions for its being true are harder to fulfill than for its being interesting. Some findings, however, cite their congruence with common sense as evidence for their plausibility.

The reasons for this are too familiar to need repetition, but it cannot be repeated too often that the route from research to practice and policy in education is far from direct. Our experience with formulating policy in school integration on the basis of social science research has not been a happy one, and neither, I am afraid, will be a policy of accountability grounded in very doubtful assumptions about the validity and perspicacity of testing and evaluation. The temptation to use the methods of research so successful in the natural sciences in education is understandably strong. And it does seem obvious that if variables could be isolated and quantified, the educational analogues would also be successful. The need for evaluation -- and the funding available for doing it -- have led us to forget that in the human reality abstraction may destroy the phenomenon being studied or tested or evaluated. Where human beings are concerned the particular individual is of first importance, not the generalization about ~~his~~ species or class or group. For the social scientist or the insurance company it is the average life expectancy of American males that is of prime importance; whether a particular American male falls within or outside this average is not important. For the individual about to die, however, knowledge of averages is strangely irrelevant.

So although education has many predicaments it does not have enough solid generalizations to turn them all into problems, and inasmuch as there are not many fundamental puzzles ~~that threaten~~ the solution of which would result in radical changes in what Thomas Kuhn called paradigms ~~here~~ - would it not be a good idea for the research establishment to look into some paradoxes?

For example, the received doctrine in education is that if we could discover the perfect learning theory, it would enable us to convert predic-

aments into problems, and problems into reliable remedies. But suppose, mirabile dictu that in fact this discovery were made, how would the practitioners in education and their clients greet it? Contrary to received doctrine, the reception would be less than enthusiastic and perhaps not even grateful.

The responses to Skinnerian operant conditioning and the behavior modification based on it provide an example. While the theory is not perfect, it does claim highly reliable results in producing behavior changes pretty much on order. There is also the prospect of new drugs and neurosurgery as means for controlling not only behavior but also attitudes, emotions, feelings. Why are these possibilities greeted with suspicion and unease? Why the mutterings of Orwell and 1984? Why not an ukase ordering the use of such methods to raise SAT Scores?

The answer, I suggest, is the ineluctible conviction that the human reality is in some important sense self-determining and therefore not to be manipulated and controlled by others. The evidence for this conviction is a subtle interpretation of an immediately cognized fact, namely, that the human mind can by imagination dissociate the actual from the possible and deal with the latter as if it were actual. What might be paves the way for what ought to be; the same mind can think of human beings as machines and to deny the possibility of their being machines. Witness, for example, the queasiness with which the suggestion that electronic technology be used to relieve pedagogy of much of its drudgery is received. All of which does not argue against doing research in education, but it does suggest that paradoxes may be fruitful for understanding why good research is so often beside the mark.

In short, educational predicaments and problems lie in the domain of human reality. But the human reality is often more at home in history,

philosophy, and the arts than in the sciences that try to assimilate it to atoms, cells, and chemical equations. As Giambattista Vico noted, the human reality is our own creation in a way that physical reality is not, and consequently we can understand it from the inside* as we cannot understand the ways of winds and stars.

Now understanding the human reality from the inside, so to speak, is precisely what the humanistic studies or the humanities try to bring about. Hence to look at education predicaments through the lenses of their historical, philosophical, literary, and religious contexts may be illuminating as a prelude to trying to find causal hypotheses for their occurrence and remediation. I have chosen to illustrate this thesis by considering three surrogatory roles historically assigned to the school: to stand in loco parentis, in loco communitatis, and in loco humanitatis.**

Before discussing these three roles it may be appropriate to note that although other institutions -- the law, government, medicine, the church -- have specialized functions corresponding to various aspects of life, the school is expected by instruction and example to aid the induction of the new generation into all phases of life. While it might be proper for the medical profession to argue that it was not responsible for the morality of its patients or the church to disclaim responsibility for their economic welfare, this luxury is denied the school; nothing -- human or otherwise -- is alien to it. And this alone casts a shadow of Sisyphus over the educational enterprise.

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*By what some have called Verstehen.

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In loco parentis

By law and certainly by custom, the school is recognized as standing in loco parentis. By way of instruction and example it should do what the parents presumably would do if they had the time and skill. The invention of non-iconic symbol systems made some kind of formal schooling necessary, and as the Sophists and their descendants shaped fields of knowledge for instruction, the school undertook to induct the young into them, presumably as the parents wished them to do.

If anyone were wise or bold enough to delineate a typical parent or household in our times, it might make sense to ask the school to represent it. Can we even sort parents into classes or groups in some intelligible and manageable scheme? Psychologists and sociologists may have such a classification; I have seen none that is simple enough to be manageable or complex enough to accommodate the variations. There is no need to recite the recent changes in the American household; more significant is the seeming acceptance of the principle that the more variety the better. Once this principle is taken seriously, the doctrine of in loco parentis becomes ludicrous, and we have reached this stage.

The school is no longer the surrogate of a typical or idealized family, but is expected to satisfy the sum of the expectations of all parents, or at least those who choose to be vocal about them. The very plea for parents to become involved in the schools is an admission that the role of the surrogate is bankrupt. What made sense in a society composed of fairly homogenous parental groups, makes no sense in a fragmented pluralistic society. The rush to private schools (preferably with vouchers) is an attempt by homogenous

clusters of families to find schools that can serve as their surrogates.

Now all this is so obvious that it is embarrassing to listen to the school establishment intoning its allegiance to individualized instruction and nurturance *in loco parentis*. It is embarrassing to hear that if only teachers loved children as their parents loved them all would be well; it is even more embarrassing to have educational bandwagons launched by private and public eleemosynary agencies to bring this about. It is both embarrassing and mischievous to bring it about in a very special situation and then rebuke public schools for dragging their feet in adopting the innovation. Before the schools and teachers are called upon to be accountable to the family, we *would* be well advised to identify the family.

In loco communitatis

Just as the school is supposed to represent a typical or ideal family, so has it been expected to stand in place of the ideal community.

The theory that the school can serve *in loco communitatis* rests on the supposition that there is a broad, albeit unspoken, consensus as to it *mores*. For example, at one time it was taken for granted in small rural communities that the school teacher would not smoke, drink, or indulge in illicit sexual relationships; these behaviors were clear grounds for dismissal. Furthermore, teachers were expected to hold views on religion, economics, and politics in tune with the dominant group in the community. These were non-debatable.

Under such circumstances civic and moral education meant no more than preaching the virtues professed by the community. Teachers did not bring into the classroom instances of the falling away from probity either official or private: that was also prohibited by the *mores*. But how does one keep up

this pretense in a school today if -- as everyone seems to believe -- children do little else but watch television? How does one keep Watergate, bribery, chicanery, hypocrisy, illicit hedonism, and universal greed out of what is taught in the classroom? And what happens if they are introduced?

The situation would be less tragic, or comical, if there were not now a bandwagon for character, moral, and citizenship education. It is tragic because the most vociferous proponents of it want moral training, not education, and each of many groups wants its version of the mores indoctrinated; not to promote moral reflection, but to stop it. The comedy is provided by those who want children to learn to be reflective about their choices and action, but are reluctant to admit any valid principles for choice upon reflection. Between blind indoctrination and bland palaver there is a little but not much to choose.

One can find in our history times and places when the assumption of communal consensus was more or less fulfilled. I think the old New England village provided a situation in which the school did or could be expected to exemplify the professed codes of the community. It was, moreover, a community in which the conditions existed for free citizens to reason together about their common problems and to make decisions based on an intelligent appraisal of their own and the community's interests (pace revisionists). This was all the more likely to obtain if in the community there were no great disparities of wealth and power; in which it still made sense to speak of the individual making up his own mind and making his own way economically. But in a community where these conditions do not and perhaps cannot exist it is irresponsible and meaningless to ask the school to stand as its surrogate.

There is still another way in which the school was expected to stand *in loco communitatis*, namely, to provide the schooling chosen by the dominant groups in the culture for their children so that they too could travel the success routes of the culture. These choices defined "quality" education. If the success routes varied -- military, ecclesiastical, political -- then there might be separate schools to prepare for each. Today, the success routes are too numerous to catalogue and each demands early specialization from the school. How a common, comprehensive public school is to represent all of these vocational and economic aspirations is a predicament indeed, and how to define "quality" education no less so, although we are always hearing about schools that do not provide it.*

So whether we look to moral expectations of the community or to its vocational ones we find diversity and a demand for increased diversity. At best the school can only approximate the wishes of the many communities it purports to serve. There is no public but many publics; no one public good but many interpretations of that good: there is no public school, but many schools supported by public funds.

In every epoch the existing *mores* of the community and the success routes of its elites have come under criticism. Socrates denounced the sophists who were prepping the youth for successful careers, and while Socrates is celebrated in all histories of edcuation, Isocrates, who conducted a very successful school, is much less frequently mentioned. That a society can passionately defend ideals that impeach its practice is itself evidence for the peculiarly dialectical nature of the human reality. The grounds for the criticism of existing institutions are drawn from the third area for which the school is expected to stand as a surrogate, viz., the cultural heritage, the repository of its greatest achievements and highest aspirations.

***Once we move outside of the standard subjects (the disciplines) the notion of quality becomes incorrigibly subjective.**

In loco humanitatis

When it is said that the school serves in loco humanitatis, it means that the school will by instruction and example induct the young into the group's cultural heritage. In the Western world, this heritage is encased in the various arts and sciences developed over the centuries by guilds of scholars. It is a critical tradition, so that at any one time it represents a highly refined version of ~~the best that~~ what has survived the scrutiny of these guilds.

Because no school can teach all of the disciplines or teach many of them in depth, the curriculum makes a selection, which comes to be regarded as the core of a liberal or general education. General education presupposes that there is something so valuable to any human being that there is an obligation to teach it to every human being.

Does such a consensus exist? If it does, it is hard to find beyond Grade 6, and perhaps the three r's is the only curriculum content on which there is consensus. Outside of the college preparatory track, very little of the secondary school curriculum is accepted as standard.

In speaking of the school as standing in loco humanitatis, however, something more than a common curriculum is intended. Humanitas, as Cicero used the term, referred to ideas and ideals adumbrated in the Greek-Roman letters. They projected a model for man that ~~in their mind~~ for Cicero defined what it meant to be human. In this sense study of the humanities was a standard by which the community and the individual could be classified as human or barbarian (barbaritas).

Of course, such an ideal went by the board with the classical tradition and the classical curriculum, although from time to time, Gilbert Highet

believes, we must return to it. The notion that man has a nature or fixed essence sounds not only old-fashioned but grossly offensive to those who claim the right to decide who and what they really are for themselves.* Furthermore, today, the scholarly guilds, the keepers of the disciplines, have little to do with each other, ~~so much~~ or with human nature so that when a student charged Columbia University with failing on its promise to make him wise, the Courts dismissed his claim with the reminder that wisdom was not a teachable subject and noted that no reasonable person would accept such an ideal and lofty promise or rely upon it. So apparently there is no unitary cultural heritage for which the school is a surrogate.

In short the school can no more stand in loco humanitatis than it can in loco parentis and in loco communitatis, and yet the expectation that somehow it will and should is not completely extinct. These vague expectations still pervade the model of the ideal teacher -- the skilled pedagogue, the father-mother substitute, the very model of the educated mind living the educated life.

These expectations persist even though the objective conditions for their plausibility have disappeared. We find traces of the former not only in the idealization of schools and teachers but in the attitude of the public toward all its learned professions. We would not dream of asking a grocer to feed us gratis or a carpenter to fix a door gratis, but from a lawyer, doctor, priest we do expect their intercessionary services even when we cannot afford to pay for them. And yet this attitude is not so crazy after all, if the

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* Like the Sophist Protagoras they subscribe to the doctrine that man is the measure of all things; unlike him they deny that it makes a difference as to which man is taken as the measure.

mystique of these professions in their quasi-priestly origins is kept in mind. In the predicaments and problems we encounter in the delivery of social services, this mystique is almost always a factor.

The fragmentation could be documented in many aspects of contemporary life, and it raises the question as to how much of it a social structure can sustain before it crumbles into mindless aggregates or warring sub-groups. There is a good and bad pluralism; a good and bad uniformity. The difference is between creative variations of a theme and random variations not even in search of a theme.

But of course our society is still intact so the fragmentation is not total and more latent than manifest. Yet it cannot be dismissed in the name of "interesting variety" or justified by freedom of choice, for both have consequences that endanger the freedom of others or impose burdens upon them. And, of course, we are bound together willy nilly by social and economic networks of which we know little and over which our control is very imperfect. Much of the impetus toward fragmentation is correctly interpreted as the revolt of the individual against these impersonal and depersonalizing forces. The school cannot escape these nuances and counternuances.

Epilogue

Seen in these contexts, the difficulties besetting the public schools can be seen as dissonance between traditional roles and the conditions for enacting them. This does not tell us what to do about the difficulties but it may sober our expectations about proposals for reform. For example, legislative mandates in behalf of special constituencies will increase the fragmentation and further damage the surrogatory roles of the school. The attempts

by legislation or propaganda to force the school to take on functions that properly belong to the police, the real parent, the real community will destroy its role as surrogate of the ideal family and the ideal community. The school, for example, cannot become an inexpensive agency for transforming the inner city ghetto into a middle-class suburb or supply the therapy that will re-moralize sexual relations. What then does all this say to the research establishment?

First, it invites reconsideration of the surrogatory roles of the school. Perhaps other institutions should be charged with duties now given to the school. Perhaps the mass media could be alloted some of the instructional functions as well as standing in loco humanitatis. Perhaps clinics in hospitals could take care of the emotional adjustment supposed to take place in the family. Perhaps we are ready for some form of civic service for youth between 16 and 18 as a prelude to the transition into higher education, vocation, and citizenship.

Second, it raises the possibility that the delivery of school services might be changed from large aggregates of pupils at one site to decentralized neighborhood shopping malls, where a variety of social services could be delivered. Many factors, including the problems of transportation, child care centers, the problems of the elderly might converge with electronic technology to make this shift feasible.

Third, it might nudge the research establishment toward providing a sound rationale for general/liberal education. For such a rationale we need to know how school inputs or the lack of them, particularly the study of the disciplines, function in post-school life. The ordinary tests that ask for recall of school inputs or tasks involving the application of these inputs will

always show that general education is a waste of time. This is so counter-intuitive that Harvard is moved every 20 years or so to re-examine general education. Why, if this type of schooling is as nonfunctional as it is supposed to be, should we feel guilty about its abandonment? I believe reading tests can be devised that would throw light on this problem.

Fourth, a new rationale would entail an examination of the traditional expectation that liberal or generalizable education is the capstone of adolescent schooling and therefore should be provided in the college years. We all know how difficult it is to persuade either youth or research/scholarship oriented professors to become interested in this type of undergraduate teaching or learning. Both the students and the professors are too busy making their way in their respective worlds. Perhaps general education should end with the secondary school. Or it may be that only selected elderly citizens and retired professors can qualify for what Aristotle thought to be liberal education, namely, that self-cultivation undertaken when one is free from the constraints of vocation and civic duty.

Fifth, the theory of the curriculum needs a thorough re-examination from the point of view of how schooling is used, rather than measured. In this connection the flirtation of schools and certain state and federal agencies with the arts in education should be a signal that some wild and cutesy things will be put forward as "exemplary" programs. If there is such a thing as basic research in the curriculum it might well take the form of inquiry into how images are related to cognitive and practical judgments.

Finally, our economists and specialists in school finance could help us all if they could cost out the various activities engaged in or expected from the school. For example, what would the custodial care given by the school -- and perhaps only by the school -- to the age cohorts between five and 18 cost if there were no schools? How much of the instructional dollar goes to getting

pupils ready for instruction, i.e., supplying conditions not supplied by the home or the community? Suppose each family were given in June an order blank listing all the services the school might provide with a unit price affixed to each. Suppose the blanks were filled out and returned to the schools. What would the aggregate of orders look like, and how much would they cost the taxpayer?

Answers to questions like these might help the establishment to think what the schools might become over the long term, which, I take it, is the intent of enlightened policy and research.